

# Historical Perspectives of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery: George J. Heuer, MD (1882-1950)



From McFadden DW. George J. Heuer: a commemorative review, *South Med J.* 1990;83(7):821-6. Southern Medical Association/reprinted with permission of Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

George J. Heuer, a founding member and sixteenth president of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery, was born in 1882. He received his BA degree from The University of Wisconsin and his MD degree from Johns Hopkins Medical School in 1907, after which he spent 7 years as a resident with Dr William Halsted. After he had completed his residency training, Dr Halsted sent him to Kuttner's clinic in Breslau as an exchange fellow. This assignment was cut short by the onset of World War I, and he returned to Hopkins after 6 months as an associate professor. During this period, his interest and practice was primarily in neurologic surgery. With the entrance of the United States in the war, he served as a captain and chief surgeon in Evacuation Hospital #10 in France, where he gained experience in the treatment of penetrating chest wounds, which enhanced his interest in thoracic surgery. After the war, he returned to Hopkins and pursued his interests in general, neurologic, and thoracic surgery.

In 1922, he was appointed the first Christian Holman Professor of Surgery at the University of Cincinnati. In 1931, he left Cincinnati to become the professor and chair of the Department of Surgery at Cornell University Medical School and surgeon-in-chief at the New York Hospital, a position that he held until his retirement in 1947.

Dr Heuer did pioneering work in several areas of surgery. He made many contributions in neurologic surgery, especially in the area of pituitary surgery, for which he devised a much-used surgical approach. His contributions in general surgery were primarily in the surgical treatment of acute cholecystitis and peptic ulcer. His ultimate and major interest was in thoracic surgery, performing fundamental research in pneumonectomy and later in traumatic asphyxia, wounds of the thorax, empyema, tumors of the thorax, esophageal resection, and constrictive pericarditis. His chapter on thoracic surgery in Keen's American Textbook of Surgery was a standard reference for many years. His work in thoracic surgery established him as a pioneer in the field, and as such, he was a founding member of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery and its president in 1934.

Dr Heuer was a member of the American Surgical Association, the Society of Neurological Surgeons, the Society of Clinical Surgery, the Southern Surgical Association, and a founding member of the American Board of Surgery.

Dr Heuer was a master surgeon and teacher. His operations were performed with dexterity, meticulous attention to detail, orderliness, and efficiency of motion whether operating on the brain, in the abdomen, or in the chest. He was a forceful, dynamic teacher whose classes and lectures were presented in a clear, concise manner and greatly enhanced by his profound knowledge and vast clinical experience. His administrative style was direct and often without the benefit of diplomacy or the fear of consequences, but in most instances, he achieved his objectives expeditiously.

Dr Heuer is probably best remembered for his commitment to surgical training on the basis of the Halsted program, which he embraced and formalized. The resident training programs he developed at the University of Cincinnati and Cornell served as models for many subsequent programs, which produced many well-trained surgeons. He was highly respected by his students, residents, and colleagues

From The American Association for Thoracic Surgery, Beverly, MA 01915.

Received for publication Feb 18, 2005; accepted for publication Feb 28, 2005.

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J Thorac Cardiovasc Surg 2005;130:1194-5  
0022-5223/\$30.00

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doi:10.1016/j.jtcvs.2005.02.061

and, although at times appearing indifferent and aloof, was appreciated for his kindnesses, warmth, and generous friendship by those who knew him well.

Dr Heuer retired in 1947 as emeritus professor at Cornell. In retirement he started writing a biography of William

S. Halsted; however, his death in 1950 precluded its completion. He was survived by his wife, Juanita Reid Heuer, and 2 sons, George J. Heuer, Jr, and J. Reid Heuer.

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### Notices of Correction

In the July 2005 issue of the *Journal*, in the article by Burkhart and associates titled, "Interdigitating Arch Reconstruction Eliminates Recurrent Coarctation After the Norwood Procedure" (2005;130:61-5), the name of one author was misspelled. The correct spelling is Nilto C. De Oliveira.

In the August 2005 issue of the *Journal*, in the article by De Oliveira and associates titled, "Biventricular Repair in Children With Atrioventricular Septal Defects and a Small Right Ventricle: Anatomic and Surgical Considerations (2005;130:250-7), the affiliation for Dr Yun should read as follows: Division of Pediatric Cardiac Surgery, Asian Medical Center and University of Ulsan, Seoul, Korea.

In the March 2005 issue of the *Journal*, in the article by Bernatz titled, "Historical Perspectives of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery: Stuart Harrington, MD (1889-1975) (2005;129:670-1), the photograph accompanying the article is incorrect. A correct photograph of Dr Harrington is provided herewith.

